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## What a magnificent year!

by Gilbert Schlaefli



Gilbert Schlaefli

1991 — what a magnificent year, but my how the time has flown!!! Internationally, the end of the Gulf War, the collapse of communism in the USSR, the current of democracy flowing through the world, the promising outlook with regard to the release of hostages, and the evolution of Human Rights in several regions of the world — all are extremely positive.

Of course, we are very far from living in a perfect world, but still. . . we must continue to pursue such a Utopia and be forever optimistic. The rush to nationalism without precedent all over Europe is not without immediate dangers, but enough. . . the goal of this short article is not to elaborate on politics and economy in the world.

Simply, this time I thought that you might be interested in sharing my personal thoughts of joy and happiness during 1991, the 700 years anniversary of our country and in contradiction to that legendary saying 'nothing ever happens north of Watford', which so many friends in the South tend to take for granted, I give you a brief outline of the wonderful occasions which took place in the northern part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

In Belfast on 7th March, at the Ulster Museum, I had the honour of inaugurating the Exhibition "The Abbey of St. Gall — A Cultural Centre".

Belfast was the most appropriate place for such a wonderful exhibition. Historically, the abbey of St. Gallen

developed from a modest beginning, the monastic cell of the Irish hermit Gallus, who started his travels from Bangor, just a few miles from Belfast. About the year 610 he travelled in the retinue of the Irish Abbot Columban, the founder of monasteries in Luxeuil and Bobbio, by way of Lorraine and Tuggen to Bregenz; with his remaining companions Columban soon continued his journey, but Gallus, who had taken ill, had to stay behind. In the Arbon Forest, a wilderness south of Lake Constance, Gallus established a hermitage in ca. 612 and soon drew disciples to the site.

The occasion was enhanced by the presence of the exhibition's author Dr. Werner Vogler, the state archivist from St. Gallen, who gave us a most knowledgeable and interesting opening talk. Among the guests, I had the greatest pleasure of renewing acquaintances with many of my compatriots living in Northern Ireland.

A special thanks should be addressed to Mr. Hans Egli, President of the Swiss Club Belfast, for his invaluable contribution to this visit.

At the Tate Gallery in Liverpool, on 20th March, Jackie and I had the pleasure of accompanying Ambassador and Madame Muheim to the opening of the Giacometti Exhibition, due to close at the end of the year. This exhibition around Giacometti's Studio, though small, is very attractive and well thought out. We took this opportunity to pay an official visit to the lord mayor of the great city of Liverpool.

On Friday 5th April, Jackie and I were delighted to be able to meet the members of the Swiss Club Aberdeen. This is a lovely city, known in the past — among other things — for its granite, but it is now thriving on oil, which takes me back to Houston, my last posting.

Both Houston and Aberdeen have a great deal in common and I felt a great spirit of entrepreneurship which exists mainly in the oil industry. It is also a great place to find interesting antiques. We felt immediately at home, with the warm welcome given by Mrs Grieve, President of the Swiss Club Aberdeen, and the club members. After the wonderful cuisine, everyone joined Mrs Imhof, the well known Swiss artist, and her husband, in

singing some Swiss and Scottish songs. A most memorable evening!

On Saturday 18th May, in Glasgow, I had the privilege of addressing my compatriots living in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dunfermline on the subject of Switzerland in the world today.

The animated discussion, after my speech, left me the impression that it was well received. The afternoon tea which followed was a wonderful occasion for us both and gave us the opportunity of seeing old friends and making new ones.

On a magnificent sunny day in June, I joined over eighty compatriots and their friends at Hardcastle Crags in Yorkshire. As reported in the last issue of the *Green Pages*, this event was the first Swiss *Landsgemeinde* to be organised since 1976.

On Thursday 1st August, I had the pleasure of entertaining in Manchester many dignitaries from the north of England, together with friends and compatriots. The whole occasion was wonderful — even the weather — and reinforced the already existing good friendship between the United Kingdom and Switzerland. More than 300 guests joined Jackie and me — thankfully in the garden!

After long months of discussing, planning and budgeting, the 700 Years Switzerland Celebration in the north of England was set for Saturday, 3rd August 1991. Tatton Park near Knutsford, Cheshire provided the wonderful surroundings, for an occasion attended by around 2,000 people. The weather was exceptionally good except for a very short refreshing shower.

A Swiss folk band and local jazz band played alternately in a large marquee, where Swiss sausages, beers and wines were served. Three smaller marquees offered an exhibition about federalism in the Swiss day-to-day life, model railway displays, stands selling Swiss cheeses and souvenirs and on video the film *Red and White* was shown. Unfortunately, due to technical problems, the latter had to be cancelled shortly after the opening of the celebration.

Adding some more "Swissness" to the event were flag throwing, alphorn

*Continued on Page Two*

**1991**

## OSA in Luzern

Continued from Page One

blowing, crossbow shooting and Bernese mountain dogs towing beautifully decorated carts. The children were entertained by a Punch and Judy Show and a fun fair. Official speeches were given by Minister Christian Faessler from the Swiss Embassy in London, the mayor of Knutsford, Councillor J. Jordan, and myself.

The Organising Committee, Trudy Bolliger, Michel Broggi, Werner Lehnher, Felix Naef, Dieter Salden, Odette Scheiwiler and Bernhard Simon, deserve the most heartfelt thanks for their tireless efforts during this special year.

The end of a most enjoyable day of celebration and real friendship, was marked by a lampion procession to the traditional bonfire and a magnificent fireworks display. I should also like to express my thanks to all those who gave their voluntary services as well as to all the sponsors for their kind contributions.

What a lovely last weekend in August spent with the members of the Swiss Club Belfast, in that somewhat isolated part of the world, Northern Ireland.

The barbecue and the non-stop singing around a magnificent open fire, in the beautiful setting of Mr & Mrs Stevenson's home was wonderful. So many new talents were discovered on this most friendly and enjoyable occasion — most notably Mrs Stevenson's wonderful voice, our Consular Agent in Belfast Mr Rüegg's culinary expertise and Mr Egl's devotion as President of the Swiss Club Belfast.

Finally Jackie and I attended the gala evening, organised by the Scottish Swiss clubs. Held at Hopetoun House in September, it proved a splendid conclusion to this year of celebration in the north.

By the time you read this article, Christmas and New Year will be knocking at the door. All the staff of the Consulate General of Switzerland in Manchester, join me and Jackie in sending you and your families our very best wishes for a peaceful and prosperous 1992. We also wish to thank you heartily for participating so spontaneously and for the enthusiasm you have shown in celebrating the 700th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation, proving thus your profound and sincere attachment to Switzerland.

Both British delegates, and their deputies, attended this year's congress of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) held in Luzern during the summer. **Berni Simon**, delegate for the north of the United Kingdom, attended meetings of the working party on the OSA's finances. He is also a member of the working party considering relations between Switzerland and the European Community. Reports by both working parties will be discussed at a future OSA meeting. **Giuseppe Broggini**, delegate for the south, attended the editorial meeting of the *Swiss Review*, where discussions focussed on the new

format of the *Review*, due to be launched in 1992. He drew attention to the need of the *Review* to widen its appeal to younger readers in particular. The four British representatives also attended the open sessions of the congress which were devoted to the theme of the past, present and future of the Swiss abroad. During question time one of our representatives pointed out the lack of publicity within Switzerland given to the artistic and creative output of the Swiss living abroad — a point which was duly picked up by several Swiss newspapers in their coverage of the congress. [UD]

## Sweden: Stylish Swiss or Stuffy Scots?

The eyes and ears of Scotland and Switzerland oscillated anxiously between Glasgow and Bucharest on 13 November. The prize was a place in the finals of the European football championships, to be held in Sweden in June 1992.

The matches in qualifying group six, which also includes Romania, Bulgaria and San Marino, have proved so tight that the solitary place up for grabs was not be decided until the final match in the group between Bulgaria and Romania. Before that match, however, Scotland took on San Marino in Glasgow while Switzerland travelled to Bucharest to tackle a rejuvenated Romania. Effectively one point in Bucharest was enough to ensure that the Swiss qualified for the finals of a major tournament for the first time in many years. Any other result — and Scotland and Romania retained a chance of qualification.

The Swiss started as favourites for qualification. Their team had already put up excellent performances away from home, winning in Bulgaria and deserving more from their tie in Scotland. With the exception of Georgi Hagi, the temperamental star of Romanian football, the Swiss players have shown themselves to be the most inventive in the group, to the delight of the purists. Hermann and Soutar would grace the finals at a time when football is desperately looking for a shining star in a galaxy of mediocrity.

It was to be hoped for football's sake that the clinical cynism of their coach, German Uli Stielki (a renowned hatchet man in his

playing days), did not prevail. He had already demonstrated his ability for shifting goalposts by demanding that Scotland and Switzerland kick-off their ties at the same time on 13 November. There is, however, no truth in the rumour that the suggested that both Bulgaria and Switzerland line up against Romania on the 13th in order to ensure that *all* the remaining games kick off at the same time.

Unfortunately for Switzerland, however, it was not to be. While Scotland defeated San Marino 4-0 at Hampden Park in Glasgow, the Swiss team were outplayed in Bucharest and lucky not to lose by more than 1-0. The long Swiss wait for a place in the finals of a major football tournament continues. Meanwhile, Scottish supporters focussed their eyes on Sophia, hoping for a Bulgarian victory in the final match of the group between Bulgaria and Romania on 20 November . . .

by Robert Pennel

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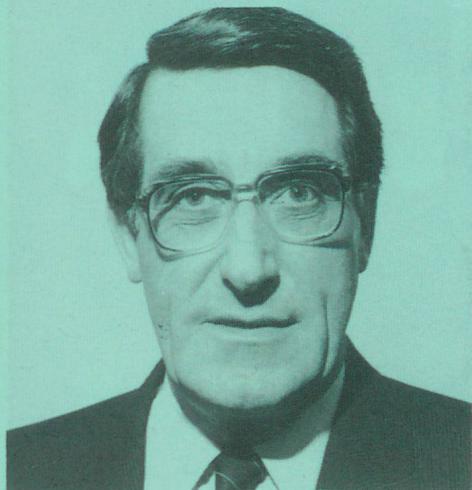
Small, international, English-language boarding school would like to hear from Swiss nationals or persons with working permission for Switzerland, interested in full-time employment from September 1991.

Qualified elementary school teachers for English-speaking children 6 to 14, or persons interested in serving as Housemother or household Assistant or cook should write to:

William Lovell, Director,  
or telephone: (030) 4.13.72



## Christmas Message



Jeffrey Long

by Jeffrey Long

The 700th anniversary year is nearly over. I hope it will leave very happy memories of the various celebrations. An exciting programme of cultural and community events was organised in most areas of the UK. They have offered ample opportunities for the Swiss community to meet in a friendly and happy atmosphere and to acquaint our British friends with our culture. New friendships have thus been fostered between individuals and members of societies.

I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks and appreciation to all the hard working people without whose contribution the events would not have been so successful and to everyone who

gave their support. It was very rewarding for me to witness the large and enthusiastic attendance at the various events and the enjoyment they brought to so many.

I hope the Festival of Switzerland in Britain will have made people aware of the important role Swiss societies and clubs play in our community and my wish for 1992 is for compatriots to join them and take an active part, forging new links throughout the country.

A very happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year to everyone.

*Jeffrey Long is President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom*

## Swiss Clubs and Other Useful Numbers

**Aberdeen** Tel: 0224 318316 (Mrs M. Grieve)  
**Bristol** Tel: 0272 873619 (Mrs Trudi Soper)  
**City Swiss Club** Tel: 071-975 6000 (Dr Duttweiler)  
**Dunfermline** Tel: 0383-723540 (Mrs U. Ditchburn)  
**Edinburgh** Tel: 031-334 2430 (Mrs U. Ross)  
**Guernsey** Tel: 0481-48188 (Mrs Ferbrache-Amman)  
**Liverpool** Tel: 051-427 1816 (Mrs M. Moor)  
**Manchester** Tel: 053 833291 (D Meakin)  
**Midlands** Tel: 021-631 4050 (Eric Westacott)  
**N. Ireland** Tel: 0232-648239 (Hans Egli)  
**New Helvetic Society** Tel: 071 727 4113 (Rose-Marie Breitenstein)

**Swiss Rifle Assoc.** Write to: Urs Schaefer, 143 Greenvale Road, Eltham Park, London SE9 1PG

**Southern (Farnborough, Hampshire)** Tel: 0252-615149 (Marcel Gret)

**South West (Taunton):** Tel: 0823 74237 (Mrs Haskell)

**Surrey** Tel: 081-647 9630 (Mrs Heidi Miller)

**Torbay** Tel: 08030-842355 (M. Singer)

**Tyne & Wear** Tel: 091-536 1047 (Mrs Nelly Scott-Niederberger)

**West of Scotland** Tel: 0360-22204 (Mr Sheffield)

**Yorkshire** Tel: 0274-588189 (Jeffrey Long)

**Anglo Swiss Society** Write to: Mrs F.R. Cobb, 2 The Mill Yard, Wickenhamabreux, Canterbury

**“La Causerie”** Tel: 081-673 4955 (Annette Yucottier)

**Cercle Genevois** Tel: 0923-221704

**Swiss Church** Tel: 081-340 9740 (Rev P. Von Orelli)

**Commission of the Swiss Abroad:**

South of Britain Tel: 081-741 4224 (Joe Broggini)

North of Britain Tel: 061-926 8153 (Berni Simon)

**Consistoire** Tel: 081-346 8094 (Mrs E. Crack)

**FOSSUK** Tel: 071-727 4113 (J. Long)

**1st August Committee** Tel: 081-892 2512 (Mr V. Berti)

**Frauenverein** Tel: 081-422 3545 (Mrs Laskowski)

**Swiss Benevolent Fund — Scotland** (Mrs Drysdale) 4 Victoria Crescent, Clarkston, Glasgow GT6 8BP

**Swiss Benevolent Society** Tel: 071-387 2173 (Mrs R. Sharp)

**Swiss Economic Council** Tel: 0952-7346737 (Mr C.J. Pennington c/o British Brown-Boveri Ltd)

**Swiss Mercantile Society** Tel: 071-636 2892 (Mr R. Kaenzig, SMS College, 34-5 Fitzroy Sq. London)

**Mothers Group** Tel: 081-340 9740 (Johanna von Orelli)

**Swiss National Tourist Office** Tel: 071-734 1921

**Swiss Relief Society:**

Liverpool Tel: 051-486 1168 (Mrs Stevens)

Manchester Write to: P. Senn, Cloud Park Farm, Dial Lane, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 3QJ

**Swiss Welfare Office** Tel: 071-387 3608 (Mrs M. Lyster) or 081-458 3859 (Mrs A. Ficker)

**Swiss Youth Club** Tel: 081-340 9740 (Monika Faes)

**Union Ticinese** Tel: 081-741 4224 (Giuseppe Broggini)

*Clubs and societies are kindly requested to send both the editor of The Green Pages and Jeffrey Long, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, details regarding their forthcoming events.*

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## CH91 — SCOTLAND : Hopetoun House

SwissFest 700 was sung out to Auld Lang Syne. On 28 September it was the turn of Scotland's Swiss community to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Scotland. Unlike the events organised at Battersea in June and at Tatton Park in August, this was perhaps a rather more up-market affair. The three lowland Scottish clubs — based in Dunfermline, Edinburgh and Glasgow — arranged a gala evening which was held at Hopetoun House, the stately home of the Marquess of Linlithgow, in West Lothian. The organizers decided that a concert of classical music was a particularly appropriate means by which to celebrate the 700th anniversary — especially, perhaps, since all of the large Swiss orchestras touring Britain this year have decided to omit Scotland from their itineraries.

Trudy Drysdale, honorary consul in Scotland and chairperson of the organising committee, welcomed the sell-out audience, which included a large contingent from the Tyne and Wear club, as well as members of the Scottish clubs and their friends. The eighteenth-century mansion provided a splendid setting for the concert which was given by the Oberengadiner Baroque Ensemble. The musicians had flown in from Switzerland especially for the event. Their repertoire included works by Vivaldi, Albinoni, Le Clerc, Haydn and Mozart. Dressed in traditional Engadin costumes, the ensemble performed these works to considerable acclaim on violin, cello and harpsichord. The acquisition of a



Consul General Gilbert Schlaefli



The Oberengadiner Baroque Ensemble (Katrín Neuenburger, Regula Caflisch, Ingelore Balzer and Noemi Brunner) with piper John Liechti of Dunfermline.

harpsichord had presented the organizers with one of their biggest problems since harpsichords, it seems, are very difficult to come by in Scotland. The instrument which the organizers eventually hired was supplied by John Barnes from Edinburgh — and Ingelore Balzer, the harpsichord player, considered it perhaps the finest instrument which she had ever played.

The concert was followed by a banquet — the catering, including the baking of the birthday cake, was the responsibility of the Edinburgh Swiss Club — and then by the speeches. The first address was given by Franz Muheim, the Swiss ambassador, who was paying his first official visit to Scotland since his appointment in 1989. The reply was given by Lord Lyell, a skiing companion and guest of the ambassador. Both Mr Muheim and Lord Lyell stressed the important contribution played by Swiss business firms to the Scottish economy. Swiss firms in Scotland employ approximately three thousand people. Both speakers highlighted the activities of the Schindler company which has recently opened a research and development unit in artificial intelligence at Livingston in West Lothian. It was perhaps slightly unfortunate that neither speaker made much mention of another

Swiss firm, Carron-Phoenix, which is based in Falkirk. Carron-Phoenix was one of the main sponsors of the gala evening. Moreover, as a number of the more cynical members of the audience noted, neither Mr Muheim nor Lord Lyell commented upon the financial value of such business ventures to the profits of Swiss businessmen.

Appropriately, the final speech was delivered by Consul General Gilbert Schlaefli, whose regular visits to Scotland over the years have won him both great popularity and respect among members of the Scottish Swiss community.

The evening was, however, by no means over. The Lothian Scottish Country Dance Band and the Dunedin Dancers performed a programme of Scottish music and dance, with members of the audience joining in until the proceedings came to an end with a rendition of Auld Lang Syne.

*The organising committee of the Scottish gala evening are particularly grateful for the support received from the Dunfermline Building Society, the Swiss Bank Corporation, Carron-Phoenix Falkirk, Cheeses of Switzerland, Lindt and Sprungli, the Hopetoun House Preservation Trust and The Festival of Switzerland.*



## Letters

### 6th Switzerland?

Sir,

Can you tell me if there exists a sixth Switzerland of which we *Auslandschweizer* are kept blissfully ignorant?

Three times, in this our 700th jubilee year, I have read very adverse press comment about Switzerland in the *Daily Telegraph*. An article in the issue of 1 August, by William Underhill reporting from Zurich, referred to a triangle behind Zurich's National Museum as 'Needle Park' and insinuates that Switzerland has the highest incidence of Aids. If this is a fact, why has this subject not been aired in the *Review*?

In an article entitled 'A plain man's guide to a complicated world', in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine* of 3 August, the entry of Switzerland begins with the sentence, 'A people more given to self congratulation than to soul searching, the Swiss are nevertheless beginning to wonder whether their splendid alpine isolation is compatible with the growing European aspirations. . .'

Now, the first part of this sentence describes in a nutshell what I dare to criticise in the *Swiss Review*. Is it really necessary that the *Review* is so full of back slapping? Who is under the impression that we Scots living in the United Kingdom cannot stomach a healthy bit about the underside of our country? We look such fools when we are not kept informed about the darker corners in the general Swiss display and are weak in defending our patch when attacked.

I would really enjoy a discussion on some of the adverse press comment that has recently crept into the British media. Friedrich Durrenmatt did it so well — what are your writers afraid of?

Yours sincerely  
Ruth Johnson

Bicester, Oxfordshire

### Calling Northants

Sir,

On 29 June I took part in the Swiss Fair at Battersea Park in London where I organized the crafts tent. Having met and talked to many Swiss compatriots from all over the United Kingdom, I became aware of the fact that many belonged to a Swiss club. Nothing like that exists in the Northamptonshire area.

It would be wonderful if we could form a Swiss club in this part of the Midlands, since the nearest, in Birmingham, is too far away. I am quite sure that there are many Swiss people around here who would enjoy having the chance of a get-together nearer to home and on a regular basis. Anyone interested please write to me at 6 Blacksmith Lane, Pytchley,

Kettering, Northants, NN14 1EQ or telephone me on 0536 79084.

Yours sincerely,  
Rosemarie Jessiman-Haenni  
Kettering

### Sponsored Teacher

Sir,

The Swiss Parents' Association was formed in 1990 and is a charity organisation registered in the Central Register of Charities for England and Wales. The objective of the Association is to provide one or more teachers for the German School, London, with the aim of supporting the school and furthering the Swiss element. The German government currently provides subsidies amounting to 50% of the cost of the school for the benefit of all pupils including those of Swiss and Austrian parentage. Among the non-German pupils the Swiss and Austrian contingents are the largest. The Austrian government has for many years supported the school by providing a teacher.

The Swiss Parents' Association has recently reached an agreement with the German School that, provided the necessary financing can be guaranteed, a Swiss teacher will be engaged as from September 1992 for the subjects of French and Natural History, thus also meeting the requirements of the Swiss government concerning subsidies. The Swiss government has informed us that it will, in principle, be prepared to contribute Sfr. 75,000 per annum for the next three or four years. We estimate that total costs (including pension fund and

Swiss national insurance) will amount to approximately £58,000, thus leaving a shortfall of £30,000 per annum.

The Swiss Parents' Association is now seeking donations from Swiss individuals as well as Swiss companies in the UK and would be most grateful for any contributions. You may also elect to become a 'patron' of the Swiss Parents' Association. Patrons' names will be listed in full on all of our correspondence (letterheads etc.). In addition patrons will receive free advertising space in connection with all events sponsored by the Swiss Parents' Association, such as school fairs etc. To qualify as a patron you would be required to make a minimum annual donation of £5,000 for a period of at least three years. May we ask you kindly to return the coupon [published at the foot of this page] to us, indicating your decision?

As the German school has since its beginning accepted Swiss children, the employment of a Swiss teacher would be regarded as an act of solidarity. The SPA herewith extends an appeal to all Swiss citizens and Swiss companies in Great Britain to support the idea.

Yours faithfully,  
Swiss Parents' Association,  
Douglas House,  
Petersham House,  
Richmond,  
Surrey TW10 7AH

□ Further information can also be obtained from Roland Fischer, Secretary of the Swiss Parents' Association. Mr Fischer can be contacted at the Swiss embassy in London.

### SPONSORING OF SWISS TEACHER AT THE GERMAN SCHOOL

Yes, we are prepared to donate £..... per annum for a period of ..... years, first amount payable in August 1992.

No, we are not willing to make a donation.

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Please return to SWISS PARENTS' ASSOCIATION AT THE GERMAN SCHOOL, Douglas House, Petersham Road, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7AH.



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### Youth Exchange Programme

Ever considered an exchange holiday in Switzerland? The Youth Exchange Programme was established in 1990 in order to provide young Swiss living abroad with the opportunity of spending a period of six weeks in Switzerland with a Swiss family. At the same time young people from Switzerland spend a corresponding period with a Swiss family resident outside Switzerland. It is also possible for participants to take their holidays together, spending three weeks together in Britain and three weeks with one another in Switzerland. While in Switzerland there are opportunities for participants to enrol in various courses of study.

Those wishing to take part in the Youth Exchange Programme must be aged between about 14 and 20 years old. Either their mother or their father must possess Swiss nationality. The exchange scheme costs Sfr.400, excluding the cost of travel.

Further details about the programme may be obtained from Margrit Lyster, Swiss Welfare Office, 31 Conway Street, London W1P 5HL. Applications for exchanges in the summer of 1992 should also be directed to Mrs Lyster, by 31 March 1992.

Andrea Farlow from St Albans was one

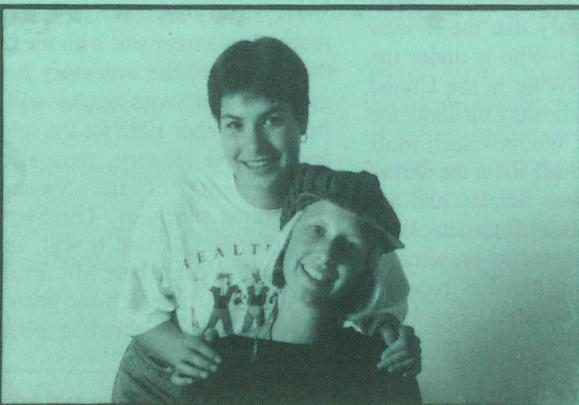
member of the Swiss community in Britain who took advantage of the programme last summer. She spent her exchange holiday in Luzern with Barbara Anderhub. And, as can be seen from the card which Andrea and Barbara sent to programme organizer Margrit Lyster, they seem to have enjoyed themselves immensely. . .

Dear Mrs Lyster,

*It is hard to believe that six weeks have already gone as quickly as you click your fingers. This has happened because we have spent many funny, exciting and interesting hours together. We didn't realise how quickly the time had flown by. But now it's time for us to say good-bye to each other. . . but we would both prefer to think about the next exciting holiday which we will spend together, instead of imagining the sad moment when we have to say good-bye. Thank you again for organizing such a good exchange.*

With greetings,  
Barbara and Andrea

So, if you are aged between 14 and 20, why not consider taking part in the Youth Exchange Programme?



Barbara and Andrea

### City Swiss Club

After the overwhelming response to the 700th Anniversary Ball, the Committee invites all Swiss and friends of Switzerland to the

### 127th Banquet and Ball

organised by the City Swiss Club for the community.

The Banquet and Ball, which will include an attractive programme of events, will be held at the **Grosvenor House Hotel** in Park Lane W1 on **Saturday 14th March at 7.00 for 7.45 pm**. Tickets are £45 per person. To avoid disappointment, early application is advised by sending the coupon below to:

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## A Dissident Dubliner Bears With Bern in 1991

by Siobrián Donovan

'Bern is beautiful' — the logo for the capital city of the Confederatio Helvetica is in English, despite the fact that Switzerland boasts four national tongues. So, why English? In recognition of the fact that English is, after all, a world language? Or simply a move to avoid rocking the boat by singling out one of the four national, three official, languages of this model federal state?

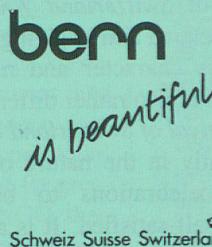
And Bern is beautiful. Its charm is, I think, incontestable. Beautiful geographically — nestling in the bow of the Aare and set against the majesty of the Berner Oberland; linguistically and acoustically — situated on the language frontier; and aesthetically — ablaze with blooming geraniums, splash with historic fountains and adorned with four miles of mediaeval-style arcades known as *Lauben*.

Only since 1848 has Bern been the capital city, or, as the Germans say/said of Bonn, the *Bundeshauptdorf*. But why mention 1848 when the septicentenary of Switzerland is being celebrated in 1991? Peter Bichsel wrote in 1969 that no-one refers back to 1848. Instead people continue to talk of the fantom of 1291. Indeed, he goes as far as to claim that any history previous to 1848 is merely pre-history. And this opinion has been voiced all too frequently during septicentenary year 1991. The counter-slogan '700 years — that's enough!' was sprayed on public buildings in Bern. And probably not only Bern. As Bern, however, only entered the *Bund* in 1353, the slogan should echo: '638 years — that's enough!' But maybe that is too much of a poetic licence, and assumes that the *Rutli* oath of 1291 *does* in fact symbolise the founding of the Confederation!

The fact that 1991 also commemorates Bern 800, is perhaps not such a lucky coincidence. 'Age before beauty', or, as the Irish might say: 'the devil you know is better than the devil you don't'. The Bernese themselves are in first place *Bärner*, and proud of it, and only secondly *Schweizer*. I may be a Dubliner at heart, but have an inbuilt allegiance to love of Ireland as a whole. Federalism and cantonal autonomy are to the Swiss what the Republic, the Dáil (parliament) and the Taoiseach (prime minister) are to the Irish. St Patrick's Day (March 17) is no more accurate than the legend attached to the

founding of Bern by the fifth duke of Zähringen. And yet it is a day of (admittedly, exaggerated) national pride and patriotic jubilation — an official bank holiday and 'holy day of obligation' all rolled into one. (It is, however, solely an Irish-American custom to dye green anything and everything in sight!)

That this Irish person abroad was prevented in this year of all years from observing and joining in on the 1st of August celebrations, was a great pity. That is, a pity to *me*. For my disappointment met on more than one occasion with the response: 'You're lucky. You'll escape'. Instead the Bernese annual *Zibelemärit* (annual onion market) is accorded the status that the Irish accord to Paddy's Day. The *Zibelemärit* is celebrated in a very un Bern-like fashion — no slow movers here, to use the rather unfair caricature of the



Schweiz Suisse Switzerland

Bernese! Rather, an attempt to imitate the Brazilians of Rio de Janeiro. Does it come off though? Excess one day out of 365? With characteristic Swiss modesty and Bernese caution, much of the programme for *Bern 800* doubled up to cater for 700 years Switzerland — highlights being the *Bärner Rendez-vous* in June, an occasion for the various regions of the canton of Bern to sell their wares and customs in a lively, folkloristic manner; and the mediaeval *Totentanz* during the months of August and September. And all the while thousands of chocolate bears of all shapes and sizes were placed at strategic points in Merkur confiseries. . .

As for the many events specially organised for the septicentenary all over Switzerland, little expense was spared. Commercially, all stops were pulled out. To me it seems, however, that the spirit and will to participate were in rather shorter supply. The *Bärner Zeitung* lamented the cost of the Botta tent. That, however, compared to the yearly upkeep and training of the army, is minimal. And no-one can say that Switzerland is lacking

in capital! Many students in Bern seemed unmoved, yet not unduly perturbed by *Bern 800*, but were vocal in their criticism of the 700th anniversary of their fatherland and generally bored by all the hype.

Peter Bichsel's cynical remark that Switzerland is about as united as Europe, seems to me not too far removed from the truth. Considering four distinctive languages, cultures and scenery, not to mention the sub-category of Swiss-German dialects, the adverse reactions to the national birthday are perhaps not so surprising. Variety and diversity may lead to greater richness, but an element of insecurity is unavoidable. However, to criticise Switzerland in the presence of a Swiss, is the quickest way of seeing the patriotic bristles rise! Friedrich Dürrenmatt summed it up in his characteristic quiet manner: 'You could even say I feel a certain passion about being Swiss. I like living in Switzerland. I like speaking Swiss-German'.

Switzerland and Ireland — two countries about as compatible as chalk and cheese. It is undoubtedly the laid-back attitude the Irish have towards work, structure and forward planning, combined with an often annoying, some even say superficial gregariousness, jovially called the 'gift of the gab', that has made Paddy's Day what is, and made the Dublin Millennium the tourist attraction it was in 1988. The slogan was simple: 'Dublin's great in '88!' Yet this was another example of highly suspect authenticity!

Switzerland is united under one flag — Ireland is not. Swiss culture is diverse, Irish more homogenous. Basically the Irish are dreamers, idealists (although the Dubliners were realistic enough to use the millennium as a carrot dangling in front of the nose of the tourist!). The Swiss, more specifically, the Bernese, are realists, more serious, more reasoned. The Swiss have seen that Irish nationalism sadly has also a violent side to it. Maybe federalism and regionalism, without any real allegiance to the Confederation, are safer options? *Bern 800* and *Switzerland 700* — I still think those are two good reasons to party! Not one party, but two! And if the reasons seem far-fetched, well, then it's still a good excuse! But then I'm Irish — two years z'Bärn haven't changed that — and I'm not an historian. . .



## Book Review

by Alastair Macdonald

Peter Barber, *Switzerland 700* (London: The British Library, 1991. 111pp. Illustrated. ISBN 0 7123 0258 1 (cased); ISBN 0 7123 0257 3 (paperback))  
*Festival of Switzerland in Britain 1991* (Antwerp: De Coker, 1991. 79pp. Illustrated. ISBN 0 0517832 0 3.)

The two books under review both celebrate the 700th anniversary of the alliance of three small forest cantons which was the embryo for the development of the Swiss nation. Both books set out to give an insight into Switzerland and the Swiss, but they differ considerably in scope and tone.

*Switzerland 700* tries to explore Swiss culture and history with a text that refers to holdings in the British Library. It is an effective method. The British Library has an impressive number of Swiss artifacts. High quality colour reproductions of these treasures adorn the pages of the book. These illustrations are not merely decorative but are closely linked to the text. This device gives the words themselves an added interest and solidity: there is the impression of a tangible object in front of the reader at all times. Generalization about the nature of Switzerland and its peoples proceeds from what these often fascinating artifacts can tell us. Partly dictated by this format the book is thematic, concentrating on topics which happen to be well represented in the British Library. A fundamentally anecdotal approach is the result, but one that gives much insight into the nature of this

conglomerate country.

Paradoxically for its smaller size, the other book, *Festival of Switzerland in Britain 1991*, seems to aim at much more than providing limited insights into certain areas. Chapters cover the history of the country, its relationship with Britain, all aspects of culture and the essence of the landscape as inspiration. All this is squeezed into just over fifty pages of text. Each of the individual authors receives scant space to explore his topic; each has time barely to mention a few notable names and themes. To the ignorant outsider this all means very little — the generalization does not proceed from a solid basis, as it does in the British Library publication. To the informed reader, all this will mean even less — the bare mention of things with which he or she is already familiar.

The scope of *Switzerland 700* is more suited to its declared aim of giving an insight into the Swiss character and nation; the insight it gives is also rather different to that offered in *Festival of Switzerland in Britain*.

It is generally in the nature of national anniversary celebrations to be blindly patriotic and self-satisfied. It is also in the nature of outsiders, like myself, to be suspicious of such celebrations for the same reasons. *Festival of Switzerland in Britain* rather confirmed my fears and I felt the tone to be smugly confident. I did not feel that I was any closer to understanding Switzerland or the Swiss through reading it.

*Switzerland 700*, however, does not try to

put the country forward as an example of harmony and perfection. Words like xenophobia, blandness and smugness crop up in the text and an awareness is demonstrated that there never was total harmony between the various cultural and linguistic groups in the country. At the same time, due emphasis is given to the remarkable achievements of the Swiss nation, politically, culturally and in the various fields of technology. No nation is perfect and the organisers of national celebrations such as this should realise that it is a healthy sign to explore difficulties and challenges and to try to find answers, rather than to merely pretend that no problem exists at all.

## The Green Pages

The editor of *The Green Pages* welcomes letters and comments from readers. Correspondence should be addressed to: Dr David Ditchburn, Department of History, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Old Aberdeen AB9 2UB. (Telephone 0224 272999; Fax 0224 a487048).

Articles for issue 1/92 should be sent to the editor as soon as possible. The deadline for submission of articles for issue 2/92 is 30 April.

In the next issue of the *Green Pages* **Regula Sharp** examines the activities of The Swiss Benevolent Society — plus a review of Sir John Wraight's new book about The City Swiss Club in London.

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